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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 8, 2023

23-108

Department of Health receives \$4 million federal grant to address young children's mental health

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) is one of 13 states to receive a \$4 million federal Project Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health (Project LAUNCH) grant, providing the state \$800,000 a year for the next five years. The purpose of the grant is to promote the wellness of young children from birth through age 8 by addressing their physical and mental health needs.

"We know families and communities are still experiencing the effects of COVID-19, and it's particularly important to address the mental health needs of our young children," said Dr. Ruben Frescas Jr., chief of the DOH Children with Special Health Needs Branch (CSHNB). "The resilience and strength of children are supported when parents and families have the necessary resources and the Project LAUNCH grant provides those resources."

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2023 KIDS COUNT Data Book report, which assesses child well-being nationally and state by state, ranked Hawai'i 8th for nurturing families and supportive communities. The report, however, also ranked Hawai'i 44th for children's economic well-being. Economic stressors placed on parents and families can potentially have a negative impact on children.

The grant – part of the Public Health Service Act of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) – will go to the CSHNB to implement the Project LAUNCH program.

The program's goal is to help improve the abilities and skills of adult caregivers of young children to encourage healthy social and emotional development and identify and address behavioral concerns before they develop into serious emotional disturbances (SED).

The CSHNB will hire a coordinator to implement grant activities through the development and support of community hubs and convene a statewide Young Child Wellness Council. It will also hire an evaluator to conduct assessments and identify areas of need.

The CSHNB plans to work with partners at the state and community levels to support workshops for families on trauma-informed care, provide mental health support for child care providers, and train more pediatricians to address behavioral health issues.

Partners include the state Department of Education, Department of Human Services, American Academy of Pediatrics Hawai'i, Association of Infant Mental Health - Hawai'i, Hawai'i Community Foundation, Hawai'i Children's Action Network, Early Childhood Strategy, Family Hui Hawai'i, Leadership in Disabilities and Achievement of Hawai'i and Primary Care Association of Hawai'i.

For more information on SAMHSA programs, visit [Project Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health \(Project LAUNCH\) | SAMHSA](#).

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